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Lucia A Keegan 02/21/2007 09:23:59 AM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

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Text:

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 00598

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ACTION: UNESCO  
INFO: POL ECON AMBU AMB AMBO DCM SCI

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APPROVED: CHARGE: AKOSS  
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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4946  
INFO RUCNSCO/UNESCO COLLECTIVE  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1057  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0448

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000598

SIPDIS

FROM US MISSION TO UNESCO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2017  
TAGS: [UNESCO](#) [KPAO](#) [PREL](#)  
SUBJECT: USUNESCO: INDIAN RESOLUTION ON RUMI INVOLVES US, IRAN,  
OTHERS

¶1. (C) Classified by: PAO Caitlin Bergin for reasons 1.4; B/D

¶2. (C) SUMMARY AND GUIDANCE REQUEST: Mission was invited by the Indian delegation to a preview of a film by the Indian Film Director Muzaffar Ali on the prose of Mawlana Jalal-ud-Din Balkhi Rumi, 12th century writer and mystic. India asked whether the U.S., together with Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Qatar, Bahrain and Turkey, would co-sponsor a resolution authorizing the Director-General to associate UNESCO with the film. Discussion among delegates centered on the content of the film with the Afghan Ambassador stating that his government could only support the film if the director were instructed to describe Rumi in certain ways and the Iranian and Indian Ambassadors defending the film director's right to choose his own content. Mission reports on the discussion and seeks guidance by COB Friday February 16 on whether to co-sponsor the resolution, which will be faxed to IO/UNESCO. END SUMMARY AND GUIDANCE REQUEST.

RUMI - SYMBOL OF INTERCUTURAL DIALOGUE:  
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¶3. (C) The film, entitled "Rumi: Breathe Info Me", has just begun shooting in India and delegates at UNESCO previewed a short film outlining the project. The film juxtaposes dance, music and spoken word to showcase the prose of Rumi and has already received 1 million dollars in financial support from the Emir of Qatar. (COMMENT: Readers of Rumi's works in the film included Americans, which we speculate is why we were invited to co-sponsor and the only Western country in attendance at the meeting. END COMMENT) The Indian Ambassador described the director as coming from a "princely" family and stated she was on instructions from her government to seek support for the film at UNESCO because of the relevance of Rumi's message to promote intercultural dialogue in today's divided world. Language in

the resolution calls for UNESCO to designate a focal point to coordinate its technical and intellectual support, which the Indian Ambassador described as UNESCO basically doing nothing but lending its name to the project. The resolution, she said, would be tabled under item 5 at the April 2007 Executive Board, which will deal with decisions already taken at past Executive Board and General Conferences.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION DEBATE:  
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14. (U) The Afghan Ambassador stated that he would like to support the resolution, provided that the Indian Ambassador would contact the Director and ask for him to refer to Rumi by his full name in the title of the film since citizens of Afghanistan, Turkey and Iran know him by his first name, Malwana. He also asked that any references to Rumi's birthplace as being in the Persian Empire be deleted, and praised the director for describing Rumi as a Persian-language poet and mystic, rather than Persian.

15. (U) The Indian Ambassador responded that she could not instruct an independent film maker on how to make his film. She stated that the notoriety of Rumi's surname over his first name was another example of colonial language still being used in the post-colonial period. India, together with Turkey, proposed suggesting to the filmmaker that he refer to the towns where Rumi was born and died by their names, and add what countries they were in today and what empires they belonged to at the time when Rumi lived there. All agreed that he should be described as a Persian-language poet since he was simultaneously claimed by Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan as a national.

THE IRANIAN VIEW:  
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16. (C) The Iranian Ambassador, who is well liked at UNESCO where he is perceived as a moderate and where he formerly chaired the Executive Board before the U.S. rejoined, was praised by almost all participants for his scholarship on Rumi. (Bio faxed to IO/UNESCO.) He emphasized that the idea of the film should be supported and there should be no intervention in the content. If this approach were taken, he said, the script would have to be sent to capitals. The film, he stated, was not made by the Indian government, but by a director who would rely on his own resources for scholarship and accuracy. Even though Rumi, he stated, was known as Mawlana in Iran, he understood that if the filmmaker wanted to market his film and have it be known in countries such as the U.S., he would have to use the better known name Rumi.

17. (C) COMMENT: The Iranian Ambassador, educated at Oxford, appointed by Rafsanjani and yet to be replaced was charismatic, persuasive and sophisticated (in contrast to his subordinate) in the meeting. He had the interesting role of promoting the film director's right to express himself freely and market the film as he saw fit, against the Afghan Ambassador who displayed a surprisingly weak understanding of freedom of expression. When the Indian Ambassador asked the Afghan and Iranian Ambassadors to read Rumi passages at the close of the meeting, the Iranian asked the U.S. representative whether she knew that the translation he was using had been done by an American and added that if Rumi could sit between the two of them, Iranian and American, perhaps all of their differences could be solved.

18. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: Mission would like to be helpful to India, one of the most influential delegations at UNESCO, on this issue, which is connected to intercultural dialogue. At the same time, Mission is concerned about too many UNESCO endorsements devaluing its already weak currency. END COMMENT.

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